



'FORSAKEN,' NO MORE

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AR RAMADI, IRAQ – A small village north of Ar Ramadi became a safe haven for anti-Iraqi forces until October of last year. The enemy hijacked a primary school and a mosque, using them as their operations centers to conduct daily multiple attacks on coalition and Iraqi soldiers. Attacks from the area included everything from Improvised Explosive Devices, to small-arms ambushes and indirect-fire attacks with mortars and rockets.

The citizens of this area may have felt "Forsaken," that is until the Iraqi Army battalion, whose military transition team carries that feeling as their name, arrived.

"The community has come back in to the area," said U.S. Marine Maj. Michael Vesely, military transition team chief, 3rd Battalion, 1st Brigade, 7th Division Iraqi Army. "The quality of life in the area has been improving."

Iraqi soldiers from the 3rd Bn. established a strong point in the area and now maintain a permanent presence, reversing the enemy situation in the area, added Vesely.

"Prior to October, there was a lot of insur-

gent activity in the area," said U.S. Marine 1st Lt. Joe Cuscina, operations advisor, MTT, 2nd Marine Expeditionary Force. "Two or three weeks after the strong point was set up, (AIF activity) went from a high level to almost non-existent."

According to Cuscina, Coalition Forces reported 10 to 20 indirect fire attacks from the area during the month of September. In the months following the establishment of the strong point, there have only been three such attacks and all came from the outskirts of their area of operation.

The members of team "Forsaken," which consists of Soldiers, Marines and a Navy Corpsman, agree credit needs to be given to the Iraqi Army battalion and the work they have done with the community.

"They have done a tremendous job, because they provide permanent security," said Vesely. "The civilians much prefer the Iraqis to the Americans. The Iraqis speak the language and understand the culture in a way we never could."

The relationship the Iraqi soldiers have established with the locals is seen as soon as



the soldiers exit the perimeter of the strong point and are immediately greeted by the children and adults of the neighboring homes.

“The people are really supportive of the (Iraqi Security Forces),” said U.S. Marine Staff Sgt. Jashon Richardson, company advisor, MTT, 3rd Marine Division, Combat Assault Battalion. “They see that since the ISF are here, the area has gotten a lot better, so they keep them safe by telling them where caches are, and where IEDs are placed and any insurgent activity in the area.”

During the patrols, the Iraqi Army soldiers meet with the civilians in the area and check on the status of the infrastructure of the community like the school, roadways and mosque.

During one particular patrol April 4th, the Iraqis stopped by the local primary school that was once under the control of AIF, to meet with the teachers and find out if they had any problems or concerns. While there, the sound of students enthusiastically reciting the day’s lessons could be heard echoing through the halls of the tiny school. Large caliber pock marks were spread across the walls and holes created new windows, making the effects of a hard fought battle clearly evident, though not a desk was empty in the classrooms.

Iraqi soldiers patrol through a small village north of Ar Ramadi.



Iraqi Soldiers pull security on a road during a foot patrol April 4th. (Opposite page) Guard duty outside Strong point “Forsaken.”



An Iraqi soldier radios in information from an ID card during a vehicle search.

One local in the area, Falau Abu Ghalaf, voiced his concern for his family's safety, stating he felt it was better just to stay inside his home rather than go out. The Iraqi soldiers say that is just the reason they patrol as often as they do.

"We talk to the Iraqi civilians and check if anyone is sick," said one Iraqi Army soldier. "We tell them we are here to protect them and help them build their schools and roads."

The effect of constantly working is not only effecting the community, but also the soldier skills of the battalion, said Richardson.

"As a unit, they are good. They can pretty much go out and operate by themselves now," said Richardson. "Their (noncommissioned officers)



A damaged wall provides a window into an Iraqi classroom.

have been taking more control than they previously did. Instead of everyone relying on the officer to do everything, the officers can delegate to the NCOs and they make it happen."

The growth and development of the enlisted leaders makes the battalion a more efficient and capable fighting unit, added Vesely. The improvement makes them better than any AIF they may come up against.

The battalion will continue to secure the area until there is a properly trained Iraqi Police Force ready to take over the duty, said Vesely. Then, the battalion can take the fight to the enemy in another, perhaps "Forsaken," area of Iraq.

